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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL/IRF

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [VM](#)  
SUBJECT: Updates from Vietnam's Northern Evangelical Church

REFS: A. Hanoi 0269; B. Hanoi 0657

HANOI 00000662 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a May 28 meeting with Poloff and visiting DRL/IRF officer, Evangelical Church of Vietnam - North (ECVN) General Secretary Pastor Au Quang Vinh discussed current conditions for the Protestant church in Vietnam. While highlighting a lack of harassment incidents for the first half of 2008, Pastor Vinh also noted continuing problems with congregation registrations, training of clergy, as well as their long-pending request for Bibles in the H'mong language. End summary.

#### Ongoing Saga of Registrations

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¶2. (SBU) Pastor Vinh reported that a few additional ECVN-affiliated churches have been able to register, but not many. Thirty-two congregations are now registered, up from 27 in February 2008 (Ref. A). He noted that eight additional ECVN congregations have also registered, but the ECVN main office has yet to receive a copy of their registration certificate, so does not yet count them in the total. While lamenting the slow progress on registrations, Pastor Vinh was quick to share that there are no further reports of harassment for those congregations awaiting registration.

¶3. (SBU) As to why registrations take so long, Pastor Vinh opined that many local officials seem to be waiting for the outcome of the review of the legal framework on religion (Ref. B). Pastor Vinh said as far as he knows, the ECVN has not been asked to provide input to the review. While acknowledging that the ECVN President, Pastor Phuong Quang Huyen, is a member of the Vietnam Fatherland Front Advisory Council, Pastor Vinh discounted Pastor Huyen's position on the Council as personal, and not one representing the views of the ECVN. (Note: Pastor Vinh and Pastor Huyen have long-standing and well-known differences of opinion on the relationship the ECVN should have with the GVN. End note.)

¶4. (SBU) Pastor Vinh emphasized that the systemic problem with registrations is the poor implementation of the legal framework on religion at local levels. From his perspective, both the central government and the provincial authorities are at fault, noting that the central government blames the local authorities for not processing applications and local authorities blame the central government for providing either no guidance or confusing guidance.

#### Waiting for H'mong Bible

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¶5. (SBU) The ECVN still seeks permission to publish the Bible in the H'mong language, and continues to press for a government response to its formal requests of two years ago. Pastor Vinh underscored the need for such Bibles, noting that there are now 115,000 H'mong followers of the Protestant faith. With regard to the complication of determining which dialect of H'mong to use for the printing,

Pastor Vinh asserted that the GVN should use the dialect most of the H'mong can understand and move forward. In his view, the GVN continues to delay approval for publishing a H'mong language Bible because to do so would force the GVN to recognize the growing number of H'mong Protestants. He went on to explain that local authorities are concerned about registering lots of new congregations and would like to control the rapid growth of the Protestant faith.

#### Pastor Training Insufficient

16. (SBU) Pastor Vinh reiterated the ECVN's long-standing problems with holding training courses and preparing enough students to become pastors. At present, there are only twelve officially recognized pastors in the northern region of Vi